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Wild Life Conservation

IN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

by *R. Bigalke*

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

WHEN the first European settlers reached the Cape of Good Hope on the 7th April of the year 1652,⁽¹⁵⁾ they found a country very richly endowed with an endemic fauna and flora, both in species and in numbers. On the night of the 23rd April, 1652, some members of J. van Riebeeck's party killed a huge Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) in a marshy area which is now a part of the city of Cape Town.⁽¹⁶⁾ After the long sea voyage from Holland, the fresh meat of this animal was greatly relished.

In his journal Van Riebeeck writes that Hartebeeste (*Alcelaphus caama*), Elands (*Taurotragus oryx*) and Steenbucks (*Raphicerus campestris*) were abundant in the neighbourhood of the little settlement.⁽¹⁶⁾ As the latter grew, wild animals like lions, leopards, hyaenas and wild cats began to do damage to the settlers' oxen, sheep and poultry. On one occasion two guards who were on duty at the settlement's cattle kraal were severely wounded by a leopard.⁽¹⁶⁾

In the year 1669 the hippopotamus was still plentiful in the Berg River, where many specimens were shot by hunters to serve as food for the settlers. In the same year licences

were first issued to settlers to enable them to hunt big game wherever they wished to do so.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, Simon van der Stel, undertook an expedition to Namaqualand in the year 1685. When this expedition was near the Piketberg Mountains, that is about 100 miles from Cape Town, a Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) charged the Governor's coach. Fortunately Van der Stel was able to jump out of the coach, and the animal was turned by a shot from a gun.⁽¹⁶⁾

An African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) was shot near the Cape Flats close to Cape Town in the year 1702, but by 1740 this animal, the largest terrestrial mammal in the world, had virtually disappeared from the settled areas of the Cape of Good Hope.^(16 and 17) The hunting of hippopotami, rhinoceroses, buffaloes, elands and other antelopes had by this time assumed such proportions that they were becoming scarce in the occupied parts of the country. Further afield, however, wild animals of many kinds were still amazingly abundant.

In 1775 the Swedish scientist, Andreas Sparrman, found large herds of Red Hartebeeste (*A. caama*) and

Cape Mountain Zebras (*Equus zebra zebra*) east of the Bot River in the present District of Caledon. On the plains of the Great Fish River he saw

only in the Cape of Good Hope, but particularly in the virtually unoccupied territory in which the Voortrekkers wished to settle.



A herd of African elephants in the Eastern Transvaal.

(Photo by W. F. Schack.)

Springbucks (*Antidorcas marsupialis*), True Quaggas (*Equus quagga quagga*) and Red Hartebeeste (*A. caama*) in large numbers.⁽¹⁵⁾

In the year 1803 Lichtenstein found innumerable herds of springbucks and other kinds of antelopes as well as herds of true quaggas on the plains between the Sundays and the Bushman River. Springbucks in particular were very abundant, and the herds often comprised several thousand animals spread over the veld as far as the eye could see.⁽¹⁶⁾

In September of the year 1835 the great northwards migration known as the Great Trek commenced with the emigration of Louis Trigardt and his followers. In those days the countryside was still swarming with game, not

According to Theal⁽¹⁸⁾ the Voortrekkers shot no less than 249 lions prior to September of the year 1837 in the neighbourhood of Thaba 'Nchu in the present Orange Free State. This furnishes eloquent proof of the abundance of game in the interior of South Africa at that time, since large numbers of lions required many head of game to live on. Some thirty or forty years later the lion had disappeared from what is now the Orange Free State.

In the year 1836 the hunter and traveller W. Cornwallis Harris found large numbers of springbucks on the Karroo south of Graaff-Reinet. So abundant were wild animals in the interior of South Africa at that time that Harris refers in one passage of his book to a total of 15,000 Blue

Wildebeeste (*Gorgon taurinus*), True Quaggas (*E. q. quagga*) and other animals.⁽⁷⁾

The extent to which game was destroyed in South Africa by hunters during the nineteenth century may be gauged from figures furnished by W. C. Harris and W. C. Baldwin.

Harris accounted for more than four hundred head of large animals of various sorts and sizes during a period of about six months spent in the interior of South Africa in the years 1836-37.⁽⁷⁾

On Baldwin's last hunting expedition to the Zambesi River in the year 1860, his party of four guns accounted for the following: 61 African elephants, 11 white rhinoceroses, 12 black rhinoceroses, 2 hippopotami, 11 giraffes, 30 African buffaloes, 71 zebras, 4 lions, 21 elands and 129 antelopes of various kinds.⁽¹⁾

Major P. J. Pretorius shot 557 African elephants in his lifetime,⁽¹⁴⁾ and there are undoubtedly other big game hunters whose unrecorded achievements exceed even these figures.

According to Harris the White or Square-lipped Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum simum*) was abundant in his time in the vicinity of the Marico and the Crocodile River, and the Black Rhinoceros (*D. bicornis*) was very common in the interior. On one occasion he counted no less than 22 white rhinoceroses between his wagons and a hill half a mile away, and shot four of them. In 1895 Kirby⁽⁹⁾ came across a cow and big calf of the square-lipped rhinoceros in the Matamiri bush (now in the Kruger National Park) along the south bank of the Sabi River. Kirby states that this was a favourite resort of this species for many years, though it was decidedly rare there in the year 1895 and altogether extinct by 1896. This appears to be the last record of the

occurrence of the white rhinoceros in South Africa beyond the boundaries of Zululand.

Even in the year 1860 game was still plentiful in what is now the Orange Free State. In August of that year a great hunt was organised in honour of Prince Alfred on Mr. Andrew Bain's farm Hartebeesthoek⁽¹⁹⁾ about five miles from Bloemfontein. About 1,000 of Moroko's Barolong drove the game, and it was estimated that from twenty to thirty thousand head of big game were concentrated on the flats around Mr. Bain's residence. In *The Friend* of the 31st August, 1860, it is reported that from 800 to 1,000 head of Blesbucks (*Damaliscus albifrons*), Black Wildebeeste (*Connochaetes gnou*), Springbucks (*A. marsupialis*), Zebras and Ostriches (*Struthio australis*) were shot. Fritsch⁽⁸⁾ states that the Prince himself shot 23 blesbucks on the day concerned.

After almost three centuries of settlement in the south and more than one hundred years of settlement in Transvaal, the position of South Africa's fauna is now radically different. In the more densely settled areas game of most kinds has disappeared almost entirely, but throughout the country there are now many landowners who protect and replenish the game on their farms. Others have resorted to restocking. There is no doubt that while many are still bent on destruction, others are imbued with the idea of conserving the wild life and are putting this into practice.

The arrival of the European in South Africa has led to the extinction of the Bloubok (*Hippotragus leucophaeus*), the True Quagga (*E. q. quagga*), the Cape Lion (*Felis leo melanochaitus*) and the typical form of Burchell's Zebra (*E. burchellii burchellii*). Other mammals like the Cape Mountain Zebra (*E. zebra*

zebra), the Black Wildebeest (*C. gnou*), the Bontbok (*D. pygargus*), the Addo Elephant (*Loxodonta africana toxotis*), the Knysna Elephant (*L. a. subsp.?*), the White Rhinoceros (*C. simum simum*), the Black Rhinoceros (*D. bicornis*) and the Oribi (*Ourebia ourebi*) have become very scarce.

During the nineteenth century discerning minds began to realise that in spite of the great abundance of big game animals in South Africa, the advance of civilisation would result either in a radical reduction or the complete elimination of these animals, unless their destruction could be effectively curbed.

On the 20th January, 1846, the Orhigstad Republic passed the following resolution in connection with the destruction of game: "Dat stelling verboden word moetwillighe of onverschillighe vernielingen van bruikbare wild, tot voedzel dienende voor den mensch, om meer te doden dan men tot matig gebruik nodig heeft, nog om dat te doen alleen om de huiden. Renosters is onder de bruikbare wild niet gerekend. Voor ieder overtreding zal de overtredcr vervallen in een boete niet minder dan tien en niet te boven gaande riksdaalders vyfhonderd naar den aard der zaak".⁽¹⁾

In the first game law of the South African Republic passed on the 22nd September, 1858, reference is made to the fact that the ruthless destruction of game in many districts of the republic has resulted in such a scarcity of game "dat velc behoefte ingezetenen dezer Republiek welhaast onder dat ongerief zullen moeten lijden".⁽²⁾ In section 9 of this law there is the following provision "Dat niemand geregtigd zal zijn, meer wild op eenige wijze te doden dan hij volstrekt tot zijn consumptie nodig heeft, of op een wagen kan laden, of wild te doden alleen tot verkrijgen van de vellen".

Stricter laws were made from time to time by the various states of South

Africa, but all these attempts to preserve the fauna (and flora) were more or less of an academic nature, since they suffered from the traditional difficulty of being able to be effectively enforced.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the establishment of game reserves was resorted to both in Transvaal and Zululand. The Cape of Good Hope and Natal followed somewhat later, and the Orange Free State still later.

On the 30th March, 1898, President Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, of the South African Republic, issued a proclamation establishing a Government Game Reserve in the Eastern Transvaal between the Crocodile and the Sabi River. In 1903 the Shingwedzi Game Reserve lying north of the Groot Letaba River was added, and these two reserves became the Union's first national park, the Kruger National Park, in the year 1926.

Action for the protection of the fauna of South Africa was prompted by the desire to save something of the country's former incredible abundance of wild animals. At first this was attempted by means of limiting the number of head that could be shot, by granting permanent protection to rare kinds, and by restricting hunting to certain periods of the year. Later a further step was taken when game reserves were established in which game could not be shot at all.

Prior to the 31st May, 1910, the day on which the four colonies constituting South Africa, viz., the Cape of Good Hope, the Orange River Colony, Natal and Transvaal, merged into the Union of South Africa, game preservation was conducted independently by each colony. But since that date the South Africa Act of 1909 has empowered each of the four Provincial Councils to make ordinances for fish and game preservation in terms of section 85 (X). These restricted powers were extended to "the preservation of flora and

fauna" by Union Government Proclamation No. 212, 1935, published on the 18th October, 1935.

In each of the four provinces of the Union of South Africa provision is made in the game laws for the establishment of game reserves. These are established by means of proclamations issued by the Administrators of the respective provinces. There is an inherent weakness in this method of creating game reserves, since it is almost as simple a matter to establish as to disestablish a reserve. Political or other pressure may be exerted upon Provincial Administrations to make reserves available for farming purposes and such pressure may be difficult to resist.

In the year 1912 pressure was brought to bear upon the Transvaal Provincial Administration to provide winter grazing in the so-called "buffer area" or "Pretorius Kop area" of the Sabi Game Reserve, now the southern part of the Kruger National Park.⁽³⁾ In the years 1913, 1914 and 1917 the Transvaal Provincial Administration yielded to this pressure and permitted the grazing of sheep, goats, donkeys, mules and horses under certain conditions, but bovines were excluded.⁽³⁾

It is obvious that game reserves established under the Provincial Game Ordinances cannot have the same permanency as national parks established under the Union's National Parks Act, No. 56 of 1926.